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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 001247

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/INS
LONDON FOR POL - GURNEY
NSC FOR MILLARD
SECDEF FOR OSD/ISA

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER EAID PREF NP
SUBJECT: NEPAL'S PRIME MINISTER SEEKS TO LOWER POLITICAL TEMPERATURE WITH PROTESTING POLITICAL PARTIES

Classified By: DCM ROBERT K. BOGGS. REASON: 1.5 (B,D).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) In a June 29 meeting with the Ambassador, Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa said he wants to "lower the political temperature" with the protesting political parties. He hopes to bring representatives of the parties into the Government of Nepal (GON) negotiating team. His efforts so far have met with some success in re-establishing good relations, especially among the second-tier leadership. Thapa reconfirmed that the GON has not changed its policy toward Tibetan asylum seekers and appealed for international pressure on Bhutan to keep to its commitments to repatriate refugees in Nepal. End summary.

THAPA TALKING TO PARTIES

¶2. (C) Accompanied by DCM Robert Boggs and AID Mission Director Donald Clark, the Ambassador called on Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa on June 29. The Ambassador congratulated Thapa on his June 11 appointment and emphasized that the USG was pleased by his pledge to broaden the government and hold early elections.

¶3. (C) The Prime Minister said his government faces two primary challenges: advancing the peace process and reaching an understanding with the political parties. He reported that he had been holding extensive discussions with party leaders, adding that he was meeting Communist Party of Nepal - United Marxist Leninist (UML) General Secretary Madhav Nepal that same day and Nepali Congress Party President G.P. Koirala the following day. In addition, he is also holding discussions with second-tier party leaders, who had offered some encouraging reactions.

¶4. (C) The political leaders realize that their street agitation against the Government of Nepal (GON) is having no effect, Thapa stressed, and may thus be increasingly ready to consider compromise. To encourage a more conducive environment, Thapa said his own policy so far has been to "lower the political temperature" by withholding criticism of the parties in the state-owned press and by urging the police to adopt a more restrained approach in dealing with the street protests. Agitation is a democratic right as long as the protests remain peaceful, he emphasized. Thapa said his efforts to change the politically charged, embittered atmosphere have had some effect at the working levels of the parties, adding that some second-rung leaders had confided to him that they saw no rationale to the protracted and largely unpopular program of street protests. The Ambassador responded that he appreciated the PM's attempts to broaden his government, adding that the cooperation of the political parties is essential to holding timely elections.

US ASSISTANCE IMPORTANT

¶5. (C) Thapa said that he deeply appreciates US development cooperation and expressed gratitude for US security assistance. In his view, there are three essential components to a successful GON effort to counter the insurgency. First, the security forces need more and better training and equipment. Second, well-coordinated international support is crucial. The third critical element is securing support from the political parties. He emphasized that he has kept the GON talk team purposely small in order to leave room for the political parties to join. The peace talks are only the first step, Thapa indicated. Should a political settlement be reached, substantial international support will also be needed to fund rehabilitation and reintegration of former Maoists. The Ambassador said that he was encouraged to learn of Thapa's efforts to form a more representative negotiating team and

reiterated USG interest in seeing the peace process move forward.

TIBETAN POLICY REMAINS UNCHANGED

16. (C) The Ambassador stressed USG concern at the May 31 deportations of 18 Tibetans from Nepal. He urged the PM to commit to restoring the GON's previous policy of allowing UNHCR to process transiting Tibetans for onward travel to India. He also raised the problem faced by long-time resident Tibetan parents in Nepal who are unable to secure proper identification and travel documents for their children. Many such parents who have been accepted for immigration to the US remain unable to take their undocumented children--most of whom may have been born in Nepal--with them. The PM reconfirmed that GON policy toward Tibetan asylum seekers has not changed, and stated that in the future transiting Tibetans will be handed over, as before, to UNHCR. He committed to doing "everything I can" to reassure the US on this point, noting that he plans to send Nepal's UN PermRep to Washington to meet with concerned leaders in Congress. He added that he plans to reply soon to a June 19 letter on the subject from nine US Congressmen.

BHUTANESE REFUGEES

17. (C) The Ambassador raised plans for repatriation of the first tranche of Bhutanese refugees. At the last ministerial, the Bhutanese had showed "evidence of a good approach" toward repatriation, Thapa said. Constant vigilance will be needed, however, including by members of the international community, to ensure that Bhutan follows through in implementing the agreement. Thapa acquiesced in the Ambassador's observation on the importance of including UNHCR in the process, but added that "Bhutan has a fear complex" about the organization.

COMMENT

18. (C) Thapa's patient optimism that he will be able to bring the political parties into his government is reassuring--especially given the lack of success evident in this endeavor thus far. Several observers within political and diplomatic circles, however, have expressed confidence that the politically savvy, battle-hardened Thapa will be able to pull it off, given enough time. We agree that the parties' sustained protests have failed to garner them much public sympathy--and increasingly, even much attention in the press. Whether or not the party leaders prove as savvy as Thapa is reputed to be and abandon their futile "joint stir" to join his Cabinet remains to be seen.
MALINOWSKI